Analysing results

The starting point of an institutional analysis should be an understanding of the results produced by different institutional factors and their impact on poor people’s livelihoods.

For example, during the course of the livelihoods analysis conducted with poor people, it might become evident that they do not make use of public rural health centres. The reasons given by respondents may be that doctors are rarely present at the health centres and medicines are often lacking. This could be having several impacts, or results, on the livelihoods of the poor – they might be spending more on health care because they have to rely on private practitioners, or their health standards might be suffering as they forego treatment, with consequences for their ability to earn a living and support their families.

The function of an analysis of results is to understand what specific aspects of the institutions involved are involved in producing these different results for poor people and their livelihoods.

The livelihood outcomes identified during the livelihoods analysis can be thought of as the final results that people are able to achieve, given the assets they can access and make use of, the support they receive from service providers and enabling agencies, and the extent to which they are able to deal with vulnerability.

Once these livelihood outcomes are clearly defined, those carrying out an institutional analysis need to identify the specific results of institutional systems that contribute to those outcomes. These institutional results can be divided into two main “types”: delivery results and governance results.

These two types of results are explained in more detail below.

Analysing livelihood outcomes

Evaluative criteria are needed to “measure” how satisfactory or unsatisfactory the outcomes are of people’s livelihoods. In the past, standardized criteria have established what constitutes an “acceptable” level of income or access to food and nutrition and these have been used to determine what constitutes a satisfactory livelihood outcome, i.e. whether or not a person or household should be considered “poor”. While useful for planners, standardized criteria of this kind often disguise critical differences among the livelihood outcomes of different groups of people. These need to be understood as they provide clues to the way institutions influence outcomes. More complex and dynamic factors need to be understood, such as vulnerability, which may mean that certain groups of people are only at risk of slipping into poverty at certain times of the year or when they are exposed to specific hazards or changes. If such groups have incomes or nutrition levels marginally above an established “poverty line” at the time of the analysis, they may not be regarded as poor.

To fully understand the factors influencing poverty, it is essential to have active and direct engagement with those directly concerned, i.e. poor people themselves and those who live and work with them. Ultimately, the most important criterion that needs to be established as a measure of livelihood outcomes is the extent to which livelihood outcomes fulfil the aspirations of the people themselves. If the subjects of the analysis generate their own criteria,
they are more likely to express their real priorities and the realities of the circumstances in which they live and avoid the imposition of inappropriate standards and measures of livelihood outcomes. The process of understanding what kinds of livelihood outcomes poor people aspire to will also provide those engaging in the institutional analysis with a starting point for envisaging possibilities for future change in support of the poor – the objectives of future changes should be the achievement of people’s aspirations.

One important distinguishing characteristic of the poor is their often limited choices about the kind of livelihood outcome they can pursue and the range of opportunities for change that are available to them. Therefore, the extent to which people perceive new opportunities and choices regarding the sorts of livelihood strategies they can adopt and the outcomes they can pursue is itself an important measure of the effectiveness of those outcomes.

Detailed and direct consultation with a diverse range of different concerned groups is needed in order to establish the criteria for assessing livelihood outcomes. Participants in these consultations are likely to require guidance in order to consider the different aspects of the “results” they achieve, including their access to the livelihood assets and inputs they need, the extent to which people are actually able to make use of and consume the livelihood inputs that are available to them, and their overall well-being and perceptions of their standard of living.

**Delivery results**

The way in which institutions in the form of service providers deliver goods and services to poor people will often represent perhaps the most immediate and clear interaction between people’s livelihood outcomes and the institutional sphere. An analysis of delivery results is therefore a key step in understanding the interactions between institutions and poor people.

These delivery results can take on many forms and the analysis of “delivery” needs to consider as wide a range of service delivery as possible. Government mechanisms, NGOs or more formal private-sector operators may be in place to deliver goods and services such as health care, education, extension services, transport, water and fuel supply, credit, security and legal support. But, especially for poor people, a far wider range of delivery results may be generated by less structured service providers and, in particular, by the “informal” sector. Health inputs may be provided by traditional healers; education, knowledge and skills may be accessible more through informal channels within the community or traditional apprenticeship schemes, or networks of friends and relatives; access to credit may depend on family, friends, employers, middlemen or patrons; security may depend on community solidarity more than formal bodies.

**Evaluative criteria for delivery results**

- Availability of goods and services
- Quality and quantity of goods and services
- Choice, price and affordability of goods and services
- Distribution and timeliness of goods and services

**Analysing delivery results – Local health services**

Local health services are supposed to provide access to a range of goods (medicines) and services (health care) for the population at large, and with a specific form of livelihood outcome in mind – good health. The standard of the services may be good and staff in health services may be motivated and committed, making good quality health care accessible (in theory) to all, including poor people. However, recent policies on cost recovery within the health service may mean that medicines are charged at relatively high prices and are too expensive for poorer users of the health service. Therefore, while the quality and quantity of health service provision may be good, its affordability may be poor, resulting in an uneven distribution of goods, which will in turn affect the equity of access to the intended results of the service – good health. Traditional health providers, working privately in the informal sector, may provide poor people with a choice that can compensate for their limited access to the medicines provided by the formal health care services. A health service that emphasizes high quality at the cost of limiting access because of high prices to users may be regarded as inappropriate, at least for some user groups – according to their own evaluative criteria. In the context of an intervention on health service provision, the analysis of this particular set of delivery results would suggest that the focus should be on the affordability and pricing of health services and medicines and on identifying ways of providing appropriate levels of health care for poorer groups.
Whatever the source of goods and services, the results they generate and the way in which these results affect people’s livelihood outcomes have to be analysed in detail, paying particular attention to the different results that the same service may generate for different groups of users. For example, existing schemes to provide formal credit through NGOs may have been effectively used by some groups to generate improvements in their livelihood activities while for others it may have only increased their indebtedness. Identifying and understanding differences in the characteristics of different groups making use of the same delivery results to achieve different outcomes will be important in identifying key areas for possible change.

Like livelihood outcomes, delivery results need to be assessed based on clear criteria. The criteria that external analysts apply may not be relevant for poor people themselves – for example formal credit services may emphasize certain aspects of credit provision, such as longer-term repayment or low rates of interest while the priorities of poorer credit users are focused more on quick availability and flexible repayment. This highlights the importance of close consultation with the concerned groups regarding the criteria they apply to the provision of goods and services. This will be important both for identifying relevant criteria for assessing existing delivery results and for establishing objectives for improving those results.

The example in the box on the previous page shows the importance of using evaluative criteria to analyse the delivery results of a particular service.

### Governance results

The quality and appropriateness of goods and services which poor people are able to access will be determined not just by service providers themselves, but also by the sets of rules which dictate how they operate and the respect of those rules. The setting of these rules is the sphere of enabling agencies and the results that these rules generate can be described as governance results. Governance results may be less tangible than delivery results, but they are equally important in affecting the livelihoods of poor people and the ways in which poor people may influence delivery results. Governance results can be thought of as the outputs of enabling agencies that establish the quality of relationships among themselves (the “enablers”), service providers and people at large, including the poor. The example in the box below illustrates how these results might be manifested.

Other criteria likely to be important for assessing governance results include the overall stability and sustainability of the institutional systems which support poor people and on which their livelihoods depend.

### Evaluative criteria for governance results

- Equity
- Transparency and accountability
- Participation, consultation and inclusiveness
- Efficiency
- Stability, sustainability and responsiveness

### Analysing governance results – Government extension services

If a government extension service is working well and providing appropriate services to poor people, this will be the result not just of the way this service functions on the ground but of a complex set of factors that have contributed to the service developing in that way. Policy decisions may have encouraged a special focus on poor people, and established measures for ensuring that there is equity in access to government services. The results of this, on the ground, may be that there are high levels of participation by poorer sections of the communities in government extension activities and poor people regard the extension service as providing important support for them in their livelihoods. Measures may have been introduced to ensure that government service provision is transparent and accountable, and to promote participation and consultation among enabling agencies, service providers and user groups. The concrete results of this might be that users, including poor people, may be asked to evaluate and comment on the quality of services provided. Clear channels of communication and recourse may be available and regularly used by people who feel that services to which they have a right are not being provided. Efficiency may be promoted in government services by allowing competitive bidding for service provision contracts between different services and private-sector operators. The results might be that, in some areas, NGOs have bid for, and taken over, the provision of extension services, and users, including poor people, have experienced an improvement in the quality of services available.
Understanding the stability and sustainability of the institutional arrangements that support service delivery might involve:

- Assessing levels of conflict, among users of the services, between users and service providers, and among different service providers and analysing whether these conflicts are linked to the ways in which services are provided;
- Assessing the sustainability of the asset base needed to use the services (for example, in the case of extension services, of natural and physical assets);
- Looking at ways in which the actors involved, including users, service providers and enabling agencies, change and the effects that that might have on service provision;
- Identifying the mechanisms by which users, service providers and enabling agencies concerned with the process of service provision communicate and provide feedback to each other and the ways in which learning within the system can be incorporated into changes and adjustments in the way things work;
- Assessing the financial viability of service provision.

The “added value” of results analysis

An important feature of poverty that emerges from analysis of the livelihoods of the poor tends to be the exclusion of poor people from participating in, and benefiting from, formal institutions of any kind. Clearly poor people do participate in other forms of traditional, local and informal institutions, often very actively, but a lack of contact with or knowledge of formal institutional mechanisms and support is frequently a defining feature of poverty. This highlights the problems facing any attempt to make institutions “pro-poor” – almost by definition formal institutions tend to speak a language and have sets of rules and forms of organization that discourage the involvement of poor people.

This problem has often been seen in the analysis of institutions that work with poor people as well. In the past, institutional analysis has tended to focus on the structures of institutions – the way they are organized, the roles they perform and their physical capacity to fulfil those roles. Analysts have concentrated on these areas largely because they are relatively easy to address and amenable to interventions that will make these institutions “perform better”, at least according to the criteria of those who work within the institutions themselves.

However, the real problems emerge when attempts are made to change institutions so that they function better according to the criteria of poor people themselves. This is where results-focused analysis becomes critical. Combined with the analysis of the poor people’s livelihoods, it enables those conducting an institutional analysis to begin by looking at institutions through the eyes of the poor. Once the analysis has clearly identified how institutions currently interact with poor people, in the form of the different kinds of results they generate for them, and where problems exist in those interactions, it will become far easier to identify those elements within institutions that actually need to change.